

The Impact of Leadership on Teachers' Effectiveness

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Abstract

The continuous and intensive socio-economic changes have created the need of restructuring educational practices as well as the structures of the schools. New challenges have been introduced aiming not only to improve the educational outcomes but also to achieve the adaptation to the new community needs. In the educational arena, teacher is the mediator, the person that expresses the evolutions and transforms them to knowledge. This paper reveals the involvement of educational Leader in the teacher's educational process. Leadership policy is a crucial factor for the teacher's effectiveness. Some practices, in relation with Leadership policy, are proved that contribute to teacher's empowerment.

Keywords: Impact, Instructional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Practices, Effectiveness

1. Introduction

The idea of organizing schools as learning organizations where the practices allow for continuous learning is rapidly and steadily considered as the mediator for achieving school improvement (Silins and Mulford, 2002). The school is gradually transformed into a learning organization which needs to refresh the processes involving its current and future needs (Huber, 2004). A great deal of research on factors promoting teacher effectiveness has been conducted by educational scholars. Leadership practices seem to have quite positive effects on teacher's lifelong professional development in the school context (Flores 2007) because they have the potential to empower teachers towards a commitment to change and enhance their learning in school organization (Bogler, 2001; Fullan, 2002; Day et al, 2001).

Our purpose in this paper is to give a brief description of the main leadership practices that contribute to teachers' effectiveness. In the sections that follow, we first provide definitions of the two Leadership Models (Instructional Leadership and Transformational Leadership).

Following that, we present Leadership practices that enhance teacher effectiveness. We then offer general conclusions that came out from six studies that have attempted to reveal the impact of leadership on teacher's effectiveness.

2. Leadership Models

Effective leadership has a key role in motivating teachers towards individual and shared learning, a factor which is considered to be quite important for school effectiveness to be achieved (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

Consequently, it becomes clear that leadership is the mediator which has the authority to develop and empower teachers in the quest of school effectiveness (Huber, 2004). Over the past 25 years there are several different theoretical models concerning the educational leadership. However, two basic models have dominated: the instructional leadership and the transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003). Each one of these models considers the school principal's role and its characteristics from a different perspective. The idea of the educational instructional leadership which was introduced during the early 1980s describes a principal who wants to manage, supervise and develop curriculum and instruction in the school context (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990). Instructional leaders usually aim to school improvement having a strong goal orientation (Hallinger, 2003) but at the same time they construct an academic pressure because of indicating high expectations from the teachers (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). According to Hallinger (2000), an instructional leader specifies the school's aims, organizes the instructional program in order to achieve these goals and tries to promote learning by constructing the appropriate climate. Several additional practices are also applied by the principal in the school setting. For example, the communication between the leader and the teaching staff seems to be quite important for the specific educational and learning goals to be extensively known and supported by the total school community. Additionally, the principal should manage the instruction procedure on the whole and supervise the student's progress. An instructional principal tries also to create a positive learning environment by supporting the professional development, sharing his vision and providing strong motivations and inspirations for learning to the teaching staff (Hallinger, 2000).

Instructional Leadership has adopted a top-down approach. On the other side, Transformational Leadership seems to have a bottom-up focus. Specifically, it does not come exclusively from the principal; the teaching staff participate too (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000) and teachers' needs and views are usually taken into consideration. For this reason transformational model of leadership is thought to be a kind of shared or distributed leadership which, based on bottom-up participation, aims to striking educational change (Day et al, 2001). Moreover, contrary to the instructional leadership which is established on direct management and supervision of teaching (Leitner, 1994), transformational principals enforce teachers' capacity and engage them in collaboratively learning. This type of head teachers attempts to link the individual goals with the organizational ones and as a consequence creates the climate where the educators have the chance to be self-motivated towards the achievement of school effectiveness, without the principal's guidance being necessary (Hallinger, 2003).

3. Leadership Practices Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness

3.1. Teacher: Individual Aims or School Orientation Aims?

Leadership, in whichever model it embraces, has as central goal to ensure and maintain the school improvement which has to do with the quality of teaching; the most influential factor of students' achievement. It is obvious though that the quality and the effectiveness of leadership is understood and evaluated in correspondence with regards to teachers' motivation and effectiveness (Fullan, 2001). According to recent research, one of the main leadership practices has to do with the teacher's empowerment which is strongly related to the central goal of the school; students' learning. The improvement of the employees' performance is a significantly important aim which the leader tries to achieve through several actions taking into consideration individuals' beliefs, values, motivations and skills (Leithwood, 2006). Structuring a specific vision and giving directions, they provide teachers with a strong motivation to improve their performance. In particular, setting a shared purpose that clarifies the roles, the objectives and the desired expectations from the teachers' performance they enhance teachers' effectiveness in the classroom.

An additional managerial strategy is the personal support provided by the head teacher and also the construction of the appropriate environment for accomplishing personal and organizational aims.

Moreover, it is the principal's responsibility to build that kind of work conditions which would allow for productive and creative relationships between the teachers and the whole community, enforcing in this way the professional development of the teaching staff. Also, the leader can provide opportunities for teachers' learning by organizing and managing several programs concerning their professional development or by offering individual mentoring to them (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Such leadership practices produce supportive working conditions to motivate and influence the teaching staff. Going through recent evidence it could be stated that leaders are also able to determine teachers' emotions which are considered to be influential to their motivation and effectiveness, such as: sense of efficacy, job satisfaction and anxiety (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

A teacher to be motivated should be helped to evaluate and recognize the need to change his/her perceptions towards a specific direction-action. So, motivation could be considered as the interaction between individual aims and the goal-orientation of the school (Ford, 1992). For this reason, a leader should adopt strategies in order to motivate teachers and coordinate their personal aims with the school ones. The sense of capacity is usually a strong motivating feeling which increases the amount of effort paid, aiming to achieve the common goal. Some of the leadership strategies which could increase the teachers' capacity and as a consequence their motivation is the positive and supporting feedback, the experience shared with the teaching staff and the communication in order to explain in details the aims and the actions that should be applied (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Positive emotions also, in correspondence with the achievement of a personal goal, seem to have motivational value which could be empowered if the principal expresses his confidence concerning the success attained through positive feedback (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Having in mind that the effectiveness of employees is highly dependent on whether they are satisfied in the working settings or not, leaders should give great attention to raise teachers' job satisfaction (Heller, Clay and Perkins, 1993). According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional situation which derives from acceptance of one's job and experience. According to studies conducted, there are several leadership activities, such as initiating structure, which deeply influence the factor of job satisfaction (Nguni, Slegers and Denessen 2006). The more autonomous the teacher is the more satisfied he/she feels in the job settings (Hall, Pearson and Carroll, 1992). Consequently, the principal should not only provide educators with the opportunity to take initiatives but also allow, up to a certain extent, the involvement of teachers in several managerial and decision-making practices (Bogler, 2001). In order to achieve this, the principal should apply more collaborative and less autocratic decision-making styles because, as could be concluded from several theories in organizational psychology (Argyris, 1964; Likert, 1967 (cited in Latham, 2007)), the participation of employees in decision-making procedures ensures their job satisfaction. It has been pointed out that teachers have the intention to be more satisfied when the principal is perceived as a trustworthy person who shares his experience and facilitates communication in the school context (Nguni, 2006).

3.2. Organizational Commitment and Organizational Citizenship

Organizational commitment and organizational citizenship are two additional significantly influential characteristics, concerning the employees' effectiveness, motivating them for organizational change (Nguni et al, 2006). Transformational leadership recognizes the importance of those characteristics. Firstly, commitment of organizational members is considered to be one of the central procedures through which individuals come to think their relationship with the organization (Porter et al, 1974). Teachers' organizational commitment is achieved when a) the goal-orientation of the school is broadly accepted; b) teachers desire to remain in the school community and c) they are willing to apply adequate effort for the school progress (Porter et al, 1974). The school leader could influence and empower the organizational commitment of the teachers not only through several practices, but also through his/her behavior. The leader, as a role model, often inspires his followers creating a vision for the future of the whole school community (including the teaching staff), a fact that strongly motivates and inspires teachers to remain in the school and to contribute to this vision. What is more the individualized consideration which is offered to the teachers from the principal, often gives the opportunity for mentoring and supporting the teaching staff towards the goal-orientation of the school, taking into consideration the personal aims, feelings and needs of the individuals and keeping in that way teachers engaged to the school organizational practices (Nguni et al, 2006). Bateman and Organ (1983) defined Organizational citizenship behavior "as a work-related behaviors that are discretionary, not related to formal organizational reward system, and in the aggregate, promote the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ et al, 1990, p.46). A core characteristic of organizational citizenship behavior includes offering help without necessarily expecting a reward.

Going through several conducted researches, leadership seems to be able to affect the organizational citizenship behavior of teachers either indirectly, through its influence on job satisfaction, or directly, through leader's behavior and personal relationship with the teaching staff (Nguni et al, 2006). Organizational citizenship behavior could be empowered via several leadership mechanisms. Firstly, the orientation towards the accomplishment of a specific vision can transform the individual work behavior into a meaningful and important activity. That activity contributes to the school involvement and helps teachers to obtain not only a better sense of their role in the organization but also a vision about their future as members in this organization.

Clarity about the principal's expectations concerning teachers' working performance makes employees to consider organizational citizenship behavior as part of their role. This stability of the goal orientation and of the working environment make the leader trustful and keep his followers engaged in the school practices empowering through organizational citizenship behavior (Organ et al, 2006).

Additionally, the promotion of collaborative working towards the achievement of common goals exhibits organizational citizenship behavior as teachers think to be more responsible concerning the effectiveness of the group. Furthermore, individualized support, as a leadership strategy, is considered to be really supportive, being an indicator of principal's interest towards employee's satisfaction and needs. As a consequence the leader becomes favorable to his followers who usually express their satisfaction through citizenship behavior (Organ et al, 2006). In 2006, Ngui conducted a study in Tanzania trying to explore the effects of transformational and transactional leadership practices on teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship. Going through the study results, job satisfaction is usually the mediator for accomplishing both organizational commitment and organizational citizenship. What is more, transformational leadership practices seem to have quite positive effects on teacher's satisfaction in the school context. The fact that the sample size was quite big (560 teachers) allow for generalizations to be made. However, even though a few interesting findings have been revealed, it should be pointed out that the study is referred to the educational context and culture of Tanzania and not to the Western world.

Another concept that has been applied in education during the last years and is considered to be beneficial for teachers' effectiveness is the teacher leadership. It is a form of collective leadership, where educators develop their skills through collaborative work (Troen & Boles, 1992). The term of teacher leadership suggests a commitment among the school teachers, to share their learning and experiences in supportive school culture (Harris & Lambert, 2003). Research evidence points out that the involvement of teachers in decision-making procedures, as well as their empowerment to adopt leadership responsibilities, increase their confidence and job satisfaction. Furthermore, taking into account the study conducted by Lieberman et al (2000) teacher leadership increases educators' self esteem and guides them towards motivation and encouragement of their colleagues. Another element is the collaborative climate among the teachers which is a characteristic of teacher leadership practice and reinforces school improvement; a process that allows the professional development of the teaching staff in a learning community through lifelong knowledge sharing (Flores, 2007). Teacher leadership seems to have the potential to structure a collaborative environment, transforming through schools into learning organizations where teachers' isolation is significantly restricted (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The practice of teacher leadership is centrally focused on empowerment, and collaboration; practices that are core characteristics of distributed leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003). In 2007 Muijs and Harris published an article, based on a study commissioned by the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT), discussing three case studies from three different schools where different levels of teacher leadership are applied. According to the findings, teacher leadership is considered to be a quite important factor of teacher's effectiveness. However, it is usually necessary to provide the teaching staff with the appropriate training in order to provide them with the capacities to take on leadership roles. While each school has been investigated in depth concerning the teacher leadership, the fact that only three schools are included in the article should not be neglected and for, this reason, generalizations should be done cautiously. Researchers conducted on the impact of leadership practices on teachers' effectiveness have confirmed what literature suggests; that leadership can influence factors concerning teachers' professional development.

Leithwood (1994) made a synthesis from different studies and he indicates "people effects" not only as the foundation of transformational leadership but also as one of the most important factors of restructuring schools. According to Leithwood a transformational leader tries to form common goals in order to guide his/her followers towards a specific orientation by offering individualized support.

In these work settings, the principal usually recognizes the difficulties of the staff, seeks for new ideas to resolve them and spends a lot of time to develop the human capital.

More recently, Flores (2007) conducted a study in six schools in northern Portugal trying to find out if school leadership affects the teachers' learning. All interviewed teachers pointed out the central influence of leadership on structuring a well-developed community in which learning is promoted through several improvement projects.

What seems to be quite interesting is the fact that teachers described effective leadership “as being knowledgeable, strong and goal-oriented, but at the same time, flexible, encouraging, supportive helpful and close to staff” (Flores, 2007, p.309); characteristics that match to the transformational style of leadership. While all of the interviewed teachers recognized the strong influence of the leadership practices on structuring a learning community, it is important to bear in mind that the number of the sample is quite small (14 teachers). While the style of transformational leadership indicates positive impacts on teachers’ effectiveness, Jackson (2000) suggests that a climate of uncertainty is often created by transformational leaders because of the increased flexibility. However, there are several studies which reinforce the conclusion that the transformational leadership has the potential to empower teachers towards the commitment to change their learning in the organization as well (Bogler, 2001; Fullan, 2002; Day et al, 2001).

While the vast majority of evidence suggests the transformational leadership as an effective leadership style, it is quite important to go through the teachers’ perspectives concerning how instructional leadership style could be effective too. Blase and Blase (1999), interviewed 809 teachers in USA to explore how teachers identify effective instructional leadership. According to data provided, instructional leaders could be effective following two practices: by communicating with the teaching staff to promote reflection and by promoting professional development. The first one could be achieved through several activities such as: giving feedback in order to encourage teachers, modeling teaching techniques in the classrooms, giving food for thought via inquiry opinions and giving praise about an effective teaching behavior. The promotion of professional development could be accomplished through other strategies: focusing on teaching and learning studies, empowering collaborative environment where exchange of experience and learning would be facilitated, applying principles of lifelong learning, redesigning teaching programs to achieve effective learning. The fact that the research tool used (questionnaires) was designed in accordance with Blumer’s (1969) and Mead’s (1934) (cited in Blase and Blase, 1999) theory which is appropriate for research in social settings, strengthens the reliability of the findings. However, the research is conducted exclusively in the USA educational context and as a consequence the conclusions are about this specific context.

Concluding, the findings of the above studies offer useful insights and collectively provide evidence to support the claim that the transformational leadership has the potential to empower teachers towards the commitment.

4. Conclusion

Current educational research has shown that school has been transformed into a learning organization which needs to be well structured and to renew itself continuously taking into account its present and future needs. Leadership is the mediator which activates inspiration, motivation, support and guidance towards the right direction bringing out the maximum of teachers’ potential and achieving school improvement. Perhaps, the most prevalent finding one can draw from the above is that practices such as motivations of educators, job satisfaction in the work settings, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship and teacher leadership are only some of the leadership factors which are considered to be strongly influential concerning teachers’ empowerment. What is quite interesting too is that, according to the literature and the evidence provided, transformational leadership seems to include all the appropriate practices that strongly influence teachers’ effectiveness. However, regardless of the leadership model employed, this could be effective if the appropriate procedures were applied.

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